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ABSTRACT

Women who, as adolescents, feared success in male-dominated fields, may demonstrate non-traditional career preferences later in life and return to school to pursue their new career aspirations. In-depth interviews were conducted with 25 women over age 30 who were enrolled in graduate or professional schools. Data showed that mature women students wanted to obtain advanced degrees because of the intellectual challenge, as well as for vocational concerns. Most women pursued fields that had interested them as undergraduate students; many enrolled in traditionally feminine fields. Single and divorced women were more likely than married women to be in traditionally masculine fields. Women in the over-40 age cohort were more likely than women in the age 35-39 cohort to be in traditionally masculine fields. Institutional barriers affecting the admission and retention of mature women students included admission, relationships with faculty, and financial problems. Personal barriers centered around family responsibilities and attitudes toward women. Findings suggest that despite these difficulties, women graduate and professional students over age 30 are extremely committed to their fields of study. (NRB)

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Paper presented at the National Association of Women Deans, Administrators and Counselors Convention, San Francisco, California, March 25, 1981.

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A Feminist Cinderella Tale: Why Women Over Age 30
Want to Attend Graduate and Professional School
and What Happens to Them

I have called this presentation "A Feminist Cinderella Tale." It deals with women over age 30 who secure their own identity and self esteem by attending graduate and professional school, rather than languishing in Prince Charming's reflected glory.

The purpose of this paper is to explore and describe a special sample of women over age 30, examining those motivations, in the context of life cycle stage, which prompted them to attend graduate and professional school, why they chose their fields of study, and the barriers experienced in the process of acquiring an advanced level degree. The identity changes experienced by these women as a result of graduate school will be described: how Cinderella emerges as the feminist princess.

Personal reasons encouraged me to undertake this study as the topic for my Ph.D. dissertation. I had graduated from an Eastern women's college, obtained a master's degree, secured a position as a history teacher in an urban high school, and then fulfilled my destiny by marrying Prince Charming. In short order I resigned my teaching job, bore two children, and became mistress of a house in the suburbs while my husband established his professional career. But I woke up on the

morning of my thirtieth birthday with a case of acne and a sense of panic: "What am I going to do with the rest of my life?" My children were both in school most of the day so I finally had a block of time to devote to my own interests. Although I had no real sense of what I wanted, I knew that simply being a wife and mother was not enough for me at this point in my life.

I had had earlier career interests that had been thwarted. As a senior in college during the early sixties, I had wanted to attend law school. Although I had been encouraged to strive for academic excellence in high school by my family, when I entered college I was encouraged by my family to be social rather than academic. The family dictum was clear, "Who would marry a woman lawyer?" Not secure in my own self, or certain of what I was willing to sacrifice for the sake of a career, I chose to get a master's degree rather than a law degree. This led to teaching history to high school students, a respectable profession for a marriageable young woman.

Yet, at age 30 I began to reevaluate what I had done with my life, recognizing that in my need to fill certain social roles I had failed to develop myself intellectually. Returning to school for graduate work seemed to be a way to develop parts of myself that had been ignored during my twenties while I was raising young children. The university appeared to be an environment that would allow me to become a distinct person, separate from being my husband's wife,

my children's mother.

I tell this story only because I am not unique. I found at the University of California, Berkeley in 1974 when I entered the Ph.D. program that there were many late achievers like myself. The development of personal identity described by Erikson (1959) and Levinson (1978) that takes place in adolescence for males often does not take place for women until midlife (Sheehy, 1974; Neugarten, 1968, 1976; Rubin, 1979). Part of the problem, especially for women raised in the fifties and sixties, stems from early socialization. Researchers have found (Coleman, 1961) that adolescent boys defined themselves around their future occupational achievment, whereas girls defined themselves by their popularity. Several of these researchers (Coleman, 1966; Freedman, 1962; Heist, 1962) found that young women expected to get ahead through the accomplishment of their husbands or future husbands rather than through their own accomplishments. Matina Horner (1968) in her doctoral dissertation on achievement motivation in women provides a missing link in women's development. She hypothesized that adolescent women tended to fear academic success because they feared that success affected the way they were viewed as women. The result is the "motive to avoid success." Bardwick and Douvan (1977) built on this theory, explaining the fear of success as an "ambivalence" that characterizes adolescent women, one that prevents them from having a sense of their own identity through personal achievement. Instead their identity is achieved through the success of a boyfriend or husband or the hope for one.

However, when Hoffman (1977) repeated the study on Horner's same women 9 years later, she found that these women no longer feared success. It became apparent that women who were unable to achieve a sense of separate identity through personal achievement as adolescents could readily do so in their maturity (Baruch, 1967; Tomilson-Keasey, 1974). The results of this research led me to conjecture that an adolescent woman who might have been anxious about success, particularly in a male dominated field requiring a Ph.D. or professional degree, might be able to demonstrate a non-typical career preference later on in life: The result might be the return to school.

Therefore, the following questions arise: Who are the women who attend graduate and professional schools in their thirties and forties? What are the primary motivations that lead mature women to apply? What determines field choice? Do women over age 30 tend to develop a new self image through attending graduate and professional school? What are the obstacles and facilitators to the successful completion of these programs by mature women students? The data presented in this paper gives some preliminary answers to these questions.

METHOD

In order to explore these issues, a 20 page questionnaire was mailed to all women over age 30 enrolled at the University

of California, Berkeley, and the University of California, San Francisco Medical School. All of these women were enrolled in PhD, LLB, MBA, or MD programs as of winter quarter, 1979. Four hundred and thirty-nine women, 68 percent of the research population, responded to the questionnaire. Twenty-five of these women (out of 200 who volunteered) were selected to undergo an in-depth interview.

The dissertation analyzed the data by age cohorts, comparing three groups of women, those aged 30-34, 35-39, and over 40, on these issues. However, since the data showed that the similarities of all women over 30 on most issues were greater than the differences found among cohorts, unless differences are significant, the data will be presented here with all age cohorts grouped together. All of the women in the sample experienced a need to grow and change; graduate or professional school appeared to be a structure permitting this growth. In general, what was different among the groups was the intensity of the issues; for example, the emphasis of one motivation over another, due to time in the life cycle and personal circumstances.

RESULTS

Who are the mature women at UCB and UCSF (Profile)

The survey disclosed an age range from 30 to 56, with a median age of 34. Less than half of the women were married or remarried (45%) with 4% currently separated, 22% divorced,

1% widowed, and 28% never married. Thirty-nine percent of these women have children, in most instances small families of one or two children (79%). The ages of the children were distributed as follows: 33% had children age 5 and under; 41% had children ages 6-12; 19% ages 13-17; 7% children 18 and over.

Family income of these women ranged from under $6,000 to over $60,000 per year. Median total family income was in the range from $15,000 to $20,000 annually. Among married women, husbands had a high level of educational attainment. Most husbands had at least a bachelor's or master's degree (48%) with 42% having a Ph.D. or professional degree. A majority of husbands (69%) were considered "professionals," followed by a large proportion of husbands in business (21%).

The women surveyed came from middle class families of origin, where fathers had a college education and mothers were almost as well educated as the father. Although a majority of the women (84%) were raised in some religion (Protestant 49%, Catholic 23%, Jewish 12%), most of these women now claim no formal religious affiliation. The vast majority (89%) of the sample was white. Black women comprised 5%, while Asian and Mexican women made up 3% and 2% of the sample respectively.

The majority of women over age 30 are found in Ph.D. programs (66%), with the largest numbers found in education and the humanities; 9% of the sample responding were in medicine; 11% in law, and 14% in MBA programs.

It is possible to generalize about mature women in graduate and professional schools throughout the country since I compared this UC sample with women over 30 in a national survey done in 1975 by the Carnegie Council. In general, the samples were similar, with the UC sample being somewhat more elite.

Motivations of Mature Women to Return to the University

The data from the questionnaire showed that women were equally divided as to the primary reason for returning to school between intellectual interest and a need for vocational training. There was a trend, but not a significant difference, for younger women to emphasize intellectual reasons and older women to be more vocationally oriented. Both motivations contribute to the development of a new identity for these women at this point in their lives.

One woman, age 33, married, with 2 children, clearly points out the importance of intellectual pursuit and a need for academic achievement delayed since college:

> I went into the program feeling that I had developed as much as I could as a person doing what I was doing. I had a stable marital relationship and felt I had experienced a great deal of emotional fulfillment. But I felt that the part of me that had been stifled was my intellectual development. And I wanted that most of all from graduate school. I wanted to make up for all those years I had lost in being a clerk, a secretary, a mother. I felt my mind had been totally forgotten about and that's why I came to graduate school. I wanted to open my mind again. And I certainly feel that has happened a thousand-fold. (English Ph.D.)

A thirty-four year old, married woman without children in the Public Health Ph.D. program talks of her primary motivation to return to school:

> I was at a point in my life where I started to get very interested in the intellectual side of myself. I had been involved with the personal, the interpersonal, and social development of myself but up to that point, since high school, I hadn't concentrated on the intellectual part of me that now is ready to burst out. I slowly began to let this side of me come out.

A Ph.D. candidate in anthropology, age 43, the single parent of three children, who returned to college and then entered a Ph.D. program said:

> I wanted to go to the university most of my life but I just didn't realize it. I really enjoyed learning. Years ago when a few of my friends were going off to college I really wanted to go too, but it wasn't offered to me nor did I demand it. College wasn't something that most women of my age attended. You learned how to type and take shorthand and then hoped to get married. I always had a secret desire to study but didn't know how to channel my interests.

Vocational interests, be it to acquire the credentials to start or change careers, was also an important motivation for the return to school. A woman in the music department, when asked why she returned to school, responded by saying:

> The Ph.D. was a means to an end. I needed it to get a good job. I loved the scholarly part of being in the music department, but the job at the end was the main consideration. I was perfectly happy staying at home doing my own research. However, I knew that the only way I could be employed at a level that would challenge me intellectually and would pay me according to my abilities was to go to the university and get my Ph.D. (age 41, divorced, 4 children)

For many women, particularly those who were divorced or single (never married) there is a realization that one will have to work for the rest of one's adult life. A fourth year medical woman student, age 34, divorced, no children, when asked "Why did you enroll in medical school?" said:

> I was not only 30, I was divorced. I had always thought I would work, but I had never thought that I would have to work. And I came to the realization that Prince Charming wasn't going to come up on a white

> horse and whisk me off and . . . save my life. With the realization that I have to work I decided to do what I had always wanted to do, go to medical school.

Some women had become disinterested or disillusioned with work and sought new careers. A mother of three children, divorced, age 36, who worked as a nurse before applying to medical school, had the following to say:

> I was dissatisfied with nursing. We were taught just enough to understand a patient's chart. There was no opportunity in this position to use the degree of knowledge I wanted to obtain about the patient. What I was asked to do was essentially manual labor rather than decision making.

There were some women, although not many, who reported that they returned to school to acquire prestige, power, and money that professional and advanced degrees often confer.

> I wanted the power of independence and autonomy and the status that a Ph.D. brings. I would achieve all this since a doctorate gives one greater legitimacy in the field I have chosen. I was afraid of this power before, but now I can handle it without feeling unfeminine. (age 34, married, no children, Public Health)

It is often difficult to separate intellectual and vocational motivations; one often blends into the other.

The interviews provided sepcial insights into the reasons why mature women chose to return to school at this particular time in their lives. A 31 year old married medical woman student claimed:

> I definitely am in a different stage of my life now than I have been in the past. When I hit 28 something happened. I got married at 21. I really enjoyed teaching, owning a boat, going water skiing in the summer and snow skiing in the winter. We did all the traditional things that we had always wanted to do, or always anticipated that we would do, a lot sooner than we thought we would have been able to afford them. Then all of a sudden, I don't know what happened. I realized I wasn't happy with it anymore. And I didn't know why. There really

> wasn't any specific event connected with this change. But all of a sudden I was ready for something else. Medical school was a partial answer to changes that I needed to have to continue my own personal growth. I think I got in touch with feelings of larger goals which I wanted to accomplish in my life.

For women over 40, in particular, there was a sense of urgency; there was a realization that if they planned to return to school they had better do so at once, time wa running out.

> I said to myself, this is your last chance. You're already over the hill. I was already past 43. This was the last chance I would have to go back to school. So this was the time to recycle myself into something different. I didn't have things at home to keep me tied to the house anymore. My children were teenagers and didn't want me around very much. I realized myself that I didn't need to be around. I needed another strong focus because having two teenage girls is difficult (Married, MBA program)

What is clear is that most of the motivations to return to graduate or professional school that have been elaborated upon through the interview and questionnaire data presented above are grounds for establishing personal identity. For some women the development of their intellectual abilities served as a means to create a new self image. Fo. others the acquisition of professional credentials helped create a new personal identity. One of the main assumptions of this study was that there would be significant differences in age cohorts in the motivations to return to graduate and professional school. Although the data suggests this premise, it is supported only to some extent. The data point to a trend in the predicted direction, although the differences do not reach statistical significance (p. ≤.10). The primary motivations of mature women returning to school are somewhat

different depending on their age: women, aged 30-34 are somewhat more likely to be motivated to return to school for intellectual reasons and older women, age 40+ are somewhat more motivated by vocational interests. Those women ages 35-39 tend to fall between the other two cohorts.

What emerged from the data were the similarities of motivations of all age cohorts: what differed between age cohorts was the intensity of one motivation over another, often due to life circumstances.

Field Choice

In general mature women reported that they received little or no counseling in regard to field choice before applying to graduate school. With the exception of MBA and Law applicants, they displayed little knowledge or concern about job opportunities within a field. Most of the women surveyed pursued fields that had interested them as college students, many enrolling in traditionally feminine fields of Ph.D. study, such as education and comparative literature, despite the dearth of jobs available in these fields.

A woman in Anthropology, a field in which there are also many women, said:

> I picked anthropology because I wanted a more theoretical approach to problems I had studied as an undergraduate. I wanted to understand the meaning behind things. I didn't worry about job opportunities in my field. (age 45, divorced, 3 children)

Among those medical students who were interviewed, all claimed that they had wanted to be premed as younger undergraduates

but had been deterred somewhere along the way. Few medical students reported that a secure income was the reason for choosing medicine. A divorced woman with two school age children, when asked why she chose medical school, responded:

> I always wanted to be a doctor, but when I was an undergraduate at Stanford I failed chemistry during my first term. I was told that flunking chemistry ruled out medicine. I was advised to study something more suitable and I became an English Lit and Greek major. Now I am prepared to do what I had wanted to do as an adolescent.

For many women field choice was serendipitous. When asked why she chose to study for a Ph.D. in Education, one 52 year old married woman responded, "I fell into it." She had taught nursery school before her children were born and then later went back to do the work she knew how to do, teach. At a party she met someone on the faculty at the School of Education who suggested she apply to a Ph.D. program in early education. She did, and was accepted.

Few women were found in traditionally masculine fields, such as math, science or engineering. However, there were a good many women in Law and MBA programs. These women tended to be more practical about their field choice than women in Ph.D. or M.D. programs. A 42 year old married woman in the MBA program tells her story:

> Well, I guess I was very cold-blooded about deciding what I wanted to study. I had been a teacher for many years before I went away with my husband on his sabbatical. When I came home I surveyed the job market since I had to give up my last job when I went abroad. I looked at the job market for teachers and realized it was poorer than it had been before I went away. The system didn't need me anymore. So I looked at other jobs that I might take and enjoy and realized that access to these jobs could be easily obtained if I had an MBA degree. I just decided that I ought to take a degree that would be

> the most flexible and broadest in terms of job potential. Everyone agreed with me, the MBA was the right degree to get. So that's why I decided on it, not because I was interested in the material.

One woman, age 46, divorced with four children, decided after her divorce that she wanted a field that was more lucrative than teaching now that she was on her own. Although she had taken a personality interest test years earlier which showed an aptitude in law (or retailing) she thought she'd try out law by working as a secretary in a law office. As she became more experienced and helped lawyers brief their cases, she said to herself, "I can do this as well," and applied to law school.

Although the women in business and law quoted above appear to be most concerned with the economic potential of their fields, this does not mean to say that there are not women who choose these fields because of intrinsic intellectual excitement. One woman, age 35, single, who as a black woman had been involved in the Civil Rights movement, describes her motivations to enter law:

> I think I finally turned an avocation into a vocation. At some time in my working life I decided I liked advocating for people's rights. I did that indirectly through work I was doing both for pay and through volunteer work. But it eventually translated into the fact that I'd like to be a lawyer. And so after a long time I came to law school.

There were some significant differences in field choice by age cohort among the proportions of women over age 30 who chose traditionally "masculine" fields of study (law, medicine, business, physical science) and traditional "feminine" fields

of study (humanities, social sciences, education). Women who entered their degree programs between the ages of 21 and 34 were signiticantly ($p. < .05$) (53%) more likely than those who entered between ages 35 and 39 to be in masculine rather than traditionally femine fields of study. A fascinating facet of the study proved to be the fact that women in the 40+ age group were more likely than the women in the 35-39 age cohort (27%) to be in traditionally masculine fields (35%) although less likely than the youngest group.

Marital status to some extent determined field choice. It was found that women who were single or divorced were more likely to be in "masculine" fields of study than married woman ($p. < .05$). Surprisingly, it was found that there were no significant differences in field choice between women who had children and those who did not in regard to whether they chose a traditionally masculine or traditionally feminine field.

What was interesting to note, regardless of field choice, was the commitment to completing graduate and professional programs, no matter what job opportunities were available. Ninety-one percent of the women in traditionally feminine fields and 96% of the women in traditionally masculine fields considered it "very important" to complete their degrees and the large majority wanted to work full time.

Barriers in Attending Graduate and Professional School for Mature Women

There are both institutional and personal barriers that affect admission and retention of mature women students. We

will examine the few most important barriers that affect them: Institutional barriers such as admission, relationship with faculty and financial problems; and personal stresses such as family responsibilities and emotional strain.

Institutional Barriers: Admissions. Although the research literature does not prove bias on the basis of sex in the selection of graduate students, research has shown that there is greater self-selection among females of all ages in application: consequently women applicants and admittees tend to have higher GPAs and Board scores than do men (Fruen, 1974; Nadelson, 1974). Among older students, self selection to graduate and professional school is even greater (Heistand, 1971). Although it is hard to document age discrimination in acceptance to graduate school, especially with the passage of the Age Discrimination Act in 1975, older applicants are accepted less frequently than younger ones (Gordon, 1979). What becomes apparent after talking to many women who have applied two or three times before being admitted to graduate school is that one must "know the ropes" if one is to gain admission. One medical student said:

> The first time I applied I was real naive. The second time I got advice. I audited courses in the MIT-Harvard Medical Program because I was told it was important to show medical schools that you could do well now if your transcript was dated. I then rewrote my essay about myself, emphasizing why the medical school needed me and my expertise, rather than why I needed the medical school. (age 35, divorced, 4th year student)

Mature students must demonstrate the importance of the intervening years between college and graduate school, and

how these years have added to their maturity and world view. A mature student must make clear why she is applying to school now, rather than at the traditional age, and what her personal contribution to her field will be.

Relationship with faculty. Professional socialization is nurtured by a collegial or mentor relationship with professors. It enhances professional self image and fosters confidence in one's abilities. The literature shows that close relationships of student with faculty promotes a greater frequency of publication and greater professional dedication (Feldman, 1974). The majority of graduate and professional students surveyed (82%) reported that they did not have collegial relationships with faculty. Only 34% of the women reported that they had mentors. Most women felt they were treated as students. Yet, for the mature woman who has held a responsible job or raised a family, it is difficult to return to student status. One student said the following:

> Returning to school at 30 has been like becoming an adolescent again. While I am glad to be studying the cost has been great to my sense of adultness, and this is largely related to the archaic structure of graduate school which is geared to young, docile, totally career oriented young men, who are used to the student role. (age 31, single, 3rd year medical student)

Although a strong majority of students stated that faculty take them seriously, few of the women indicated that they have frequent interactions of an academic nature with faculty outside the classroom and even fewer indicated that they had frequent professional social interactions. The result is the lack of

collegial or mentor relationships, so important to professional socialization.

Financial problems. The high cost of graduate education is exacerbated for mature women. It was reported that the most important source of financial support of women surveyed for this study in order of importance was: employment (25%), income from spouse's job (22%) fellowships and grants (13%), and loans (9%). Medical and law students in particular depend heavily on loans. A fourth year medical student who is divorced with three children made the following typical remark:

> I haven't felt the financial stress yet because they've been very lenient in giving me loans. But I'm going to feel a tremendous financial stress when I have to start paying them back a year from now. It's going to be a disaster. I owe over $30,000.

Research (Heistand, 1971) has shown that older students tend not to request financial aid other than loans, since they fear it might diminish their chances of acceptance into a program. Significantly more women age 30-34 in this study ($p. < .05$) applied for financial aid than did women over age 40, confirming past research findings. Younger women received more research assistantships, took out more loans, and applied for more institutional grants than did older women. Older women may be particularly reluctant to take out loans, possibly since they will have less time over the life span to pay back these debts. It is also probable that these women have family expenses, such as college tuition for children, and

are not willing to go into debt for their own education.

Single women received more aid from the university in terms of research assistantships, loans, and institutional grants, and comparatively more married women depended on spouse support, investments, and employment. Perhaps it is assumed that married women will be supported and therefore receive less aid than single women. One woman recalled her disappointment:

> I expected the department to provide more in the way of TAs and other economic support than they in fact did. This was a very bitter discovery. Because I was married and because I'm more than a generation older than other students, it was assumed, without anybody bothering to check, that I had adequate support. They thought that since I was married I didn't need any support. It made me very angry and resentful to realize that research assistantships and teaching assistantships were given, quarter after quarter, year after year, to people who were certainly not brighter than I, or whose talents were not any greater than mine. (age 41, separated, children, music)

It is not only the economic necessity of financial aid, but the confirmation of worth that grants and assistantships give, that makes financial assistance so important.

Personal Barriers: Emotional strain and family responsibility. Several responses to the questionnaire were analyzed to measure emotional strain. The question, "To what extent has each of the following factors been a problem for you in your current degree program?" had several subquestions that tapped this variable: emotional strain; conflict between family responsibilities and school work; lack of time. These questions, crosstabulated with marital status and motherhood status, were collapsed into the following categories: single women (divorced women and women never married); married women without children; married women with children; and divorced women

with children.

The majority of women students, regardless of family configuration, experienced "emotional strain" and a "lack of time." It is only when we look at the conflict experienced between family responsibilities and school work that we see significant differences between groups. Married women with children (84%) and divorced women with children (76%) experienced more emotional strain, based on this dual conflict, than did single women (42%) or married women without children (43%). It is the accountability for children that leads to conflicts of responsibilities resulting in emotional strain. The needs and demands of children of any age are constant and often an external variable over which the most dedicated and committed woman has no control. A married woman with preschool children said the following:

> I'd say the hardest problem of being in graduate school happened with things not strictly related at all to school. It was not the work but just the other external problems of being a mother.

Problems are intensified for the divorced woman. A single mother with three teenage children reports:

> School has been difficult and I have received no emotional support from the faculty and often have been harrassed because of my family commitments. I have often felt very conflicted about having to leave my children on their own for long periods, although they have been capable in general in handling this. I have suffered considerable anxiety over their welfare. I have also missed being able to spend time with them. I have not had a permanent significant other in my life who was capable of filling some of their needs, mainly due to the nature of my degree program and its somewhat extraordinary demands on my time. The continuous

> anxiety over adequate financial assistance has also caused me great concern and has impaired my ability to achieve my academic potential. (age 36, medicine)

However, the divorced woman is often more focused, since she is concerned about school and children, whereas the married woman must make time for school, children, and spouse.

What was surprising to find, however, was that younger children (age 5 and under) caused less strain; mothers of children ages 6-12 were slightly more likely to report problems of emotional strain than were those women with younger children. Women with school age children often find that their children have greater emotional needs to be satisfied as they are growing up than preschool children, who can be administered to by an outsider for their physical rather than emotional needs.

Child care is one of the most serious problems facing women in graduate school, particularly for younger women with preschool children.

> Nothing having to do with kids has kept me out. I haven't stayed home. I have a reliable source of babysitters, alternative babysitters and backup babysitters that's worked out. The hardest part of school is the quest to find the perfect sitter. (divorced, 3 children, 3rd year medical student)

Husband support helps to alleviate emotional strain. However, this study found that the older women (over age 35) were less likely than the younger women (30-34) to ask for help from spouse and children. Older women are still affected by the set of values which prevailed prior to the feminist movement, and find it hard not to try to "do it all." They very rarely ask either children or husband to pitch in very

much with work around the house, but just add the load of school work onto their home responsibilities. Guilt induces them to overload themselves, causing emotional strain. One woman reported:

> My children will do anything if I ask, but they aren't used to washing their own clothes or cooking. They're used to having a mother around and it's easier to just do what has to be done than trying to train them now. (age 50, married, 6 children, MBA)

The personal costs of graduate education are great. The following are but a small sample of the "personal cost."

> The greatest personal expense of graduate school has been my total exhaustion. Consequently I'm ill-equipped to handle family crises. I mean, I consider a birthday a crisis; a child's party is just one more thing one has to do. You don't know where you'll get the time or energy to meet the situation. (age 33, married, children, English)

> I have paid a high price for returning to school in terms of things I have had to give up in my life: friends I can't see, painting and music which are no longer an integral part of my life, bicycle trips with the kids; these are high costs. Unconsciously I am always aware of this, and sometimes I question whether it is all worth it. (age 43, divorced, children, economics)

> The other day it just came into my mind that I had been in school for the last 10 years. The world has gone by my door and one day I'm going to wake up and find myself an old woman. I have no time for friends, or to pursue a social life. I am just so tired. (age 45, divorced, children, anthropology)

Yet these women are determined to persist.

DISCUSSION

These findings indicate that women graduate and professional students over age 30 are extremely committed to their fields of

study, despite the difficulties they face in meeting their responsibilities as students.

Mature women students wanted to obtain advanced degrees because of intellectual challenge, as well as for vocational concerns. They hoped to develop a feeling of achievement and competence, often in a field put aside in their youth. It became clear, especially through the interviews, that these women used the process of education as a means to develop an emerging sense of personal identity. A questionnaire item taken from Weathersby (1977) was asked in the in-depth interviews to assess this change in identity: interviewees were asked to think about their lives as chapters in an autobiography, giving chapter headings to the present period, the period left behind, and the future period. Upon examination of their present and future chapter headings, it seems clear that these women have attained "a sense of knowing where they are going" (Erikson's definition of identity, 1959, p. 118). What is most striking about the period titles is the progression from a past of doubt, chaos, ambiguity, to a clearer sense of where one is now, and an anticipated positive sense of where one will be going in the future. This is particularly true for women who are near completion of their programs.

Let me give you some concrete examples of the titles of their chapter headings. Titles consistently repeated to describe the past were: groping, agony, tough road to hoe, chaos, identity search, confusion, storm, travail.

Titles used to describe the present were: metamorphosis, jumping off, self-actualization, fulfillment of delayed ambition, I am an adult now, emerging, getting it all together. The future was labeled: flowering, making it, rebirth, consolidation of self.

The real test of a consolidated identity will take place after these women have completed their degrees and have worked awhile in their chosen fields. Their sense of self will grow and change as they become working professionals rather than apprentices. In their search for themselves these women have often set their academic work as their priority, depending upon their own hard work to make them special rather than waiting for Prince Charming to come and whisk them away. They have changed from being Cinderella into potential feminist princesses.

In concluding I believe that there are many far reaching implications which stem from this research. We must reconsider the work of occupational theorists who emphasize that career choices are made in youth. It is apparent from this research that career choices are made by different people, particularly women, at different times in the life cycle. So long as one has "a sense of knowing where one is going," one can begin a profession at age 22 or at age 52.

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